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PROBATION SERVICES STUDY COMMITTEE

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Authority: P.L. 131-1998

MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: September 28, 2000
Meeting Time: 10:00 A.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington St.,
Room 401-B
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 3

Members Present: Rep. Scott Mellinger, Chair; Rep. Ralph Foley; Sen. Charles Meeks; Sen. Anita Bowser; Chris Beeson; Judge Mary Beth Bonaventura; Madonna Roach; Joe Hooker; Judge Thomas Ryan; Sharon Duke; Iris Kiesling; David Matsey; Craig Hanks; Dave Powell; Jim Brewer; Robert Chamness.

Members Absent: Lance Hamner; Chris Cunningham; Marty Womacks; Glenn Boyster; Steve Cradick.

Rep. Mellinger called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. After an introduction by members, the committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

The first item on the agenda was a discussion about probation user fees that probation departments collect for both adult and juvenile offenders. Mark Goodpaster, Fiscal Analyst for the Committee, distributed a memo to the members that compares what counties and cities and towns spend on probation departments and what they collect in probation user fees. A copy of this report is included in Attachment 1.

After this presentation, the members of the committee discussed the arguments for and against increasing probation user fees. Members of the committee and the audience pointed out the

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following:

- since most offenders are on probation are relatively poor, it is not likely that increasing collection efforts will significantly increase revenues collected from user fees;
- increasing fees and collection efforts could redefine the role of probation officers so they are less like criminal justice professionals and more like collection agents;
- probation user fees are an inconsistent stream of money;
- increasing collection efforts for the probation fee could reduce the collection rate for other fees that offenders also pay;
- some counties have been able to fund almost half of their probation officers with probation user fees;
- the bulk of probationers who pay are misdemeanants, and most of these offenders have jobs and can keep paying the fees;
- a potential solution for increasing collection efforts is to increase the fee on the high end but not on the low end;
- all parties want to avoid forcing probationers back into crime because they experience difficulty paying the fees that they are assessed.

The next item on the agenda was probation officer salaries. Mark Goodpaster presented a report to the committee on the average salary of probation officers. This memo is Attachment 2.

Members of the committee and the audience discussed the issues related to increasing the salaries of probation officers. During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- The current salary grid does not encourage experienced officers to remain in the probation officer profession because no longevity adjustment are included in salary matrices.
- There are good reasons for state subsidy of probation officer salaries. First, the state subsidizes other court officers such as public defenders and secondly, probation programs help the state by reducing the number of offenders who would otherwise be either in state prisons or perhaps in the community without supervision or monitoring.
- Illinois might be a good model for the committee to examine.
- A handout was distributed that compares the salaries of probation officers in Indiana with probation officers salaries in other states. (see Attachment 3)
- While the vast majority of counties meet the minimal standards for the salaries few counties meet the maximum workload standards established by the Judicial Conference. (Note: This topic was discussed at the meeting on September 7).
- One possible solution would be to establish a levy for the probation officer salaries combined with an increase in the probation user fees.

The final item on the agenda was the issue of higher education benefits for the surviving children and spouses of probation officers who are killed in the line of duty. Members of both the committee and the audience noted that they knew of only one death of a probation officer killed in the line of duty. This officer had a wife and two surviving children. It was decided that specific legislation was needed to provide the tuition exemption for his children and any surviving child of an officer killed in the line of duty because administrators at state universities did not believe that specific authorization existed in current law to allow them to exempt these children from tuition.

Representative Mellinger announced that the two final meetings of the probation issues study committee would be on October 10 at 10:30 a.m. and on October 24 at 10:30 a.m.

